

## Increased transparency in IARC Monograph programme

In 2003, *The Lancet Oncology* and *The Lancet* published a series of articles<sup>1–4</sup> about the credibility of WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). These articles criticised a lack of transparency in the Monograph programme—an initiative established in 1971 to assess independently the carcinogenic risk to human beings of various agents, chemicals, and other substances. The articles also highlighted concerns about the inappropriate influence of invited specialists who had links to industry; the lack of disclosure of conflict-of-interest declarations; and the publication of names of working-group members only after attendance of the Monograph meetings.

1 year after these events, Peter Boyle, the then newly appointed Director of IARC, and Vincent Coglianò, the then also newly appointed Head of the Carcinogen Identification and Evaluation group that oversees the Monograph programme, contacted *The Lancet Oncology* to discuss ways in which we could collectively address the issues raised about IARC and its procedures. As a result, we introduced the Policy Watch<sup>5</sup> section, in which the key findings of every Monograph meeting are summarised up to 12 months before the corresponding Monograph appears in print. These articles increase IARC's accountability by improving dissemination of the Monograph findings to a wider audience, which in turn compels a greater need for transparency in the way that results and conclusions are formulated. Furthermore, publicising the names of working-group members and invited specialists in Policy Watch articles allows for a period of reflection during which concerns about the meeting<sup>6</sup> can be communicated to IARC and addressed<sup>7</sup> before publication of the Monograph. Finally, Policy Watch articles have also included a declaration on the conflicts of interest for all IARC authors in accordance with *The Lancet Oncology's* rules.<sup>8</sup>

After the first Policy Watch<sup>5</sup> in September, 2004, *The Lancet Oncology* and IARC agreed to continue discussions on more comprehensive methods of improving transparency in the Monograph programme. The outcome of those negotiations is announced in this issue by Coglianò and colleagues.<sup>9</sup> Starting with the Monograph meeting on polycyclic aromatic

hydrocarbons (Oct 11–18, 2005), all working-group members and invited specialists will receive a *Lancet Oncology* conflict-of-interest declaration document in addition to WHO's Declaration on Interests. Both questionnaires will be completed, and the former returned to *The Lancet Oncology* by IARC. As a consequence, all future Policy Watch articles will list competing interests for working-group members and invited specialists, along with the names of any observers or representatives of national and international health agencies. We will continue to publish a conflict-of-interest statement for IARC authors of the Policy Watch. Furthermore, the Policy Watch will increase in length to allow better recognition<sup>7,10</sup> of source data used to make carcinogenicity assessments.

The joint announcement made by *The Lancet Oncology* and IARC in this issue is an important step towards restoring trust in the way that results of studies done by publicly funded agencies are both prepared and reported. The issues encountered by IARC are certainly not unique and we hope that this joint initiative will serve as a model for other health agencies. Because the Monograph programme has wide-ranging and vital public-health implications, *The Lancet Oncology* commends IARC in the way in which it has responded to criticism, and are pleased to have been given this opportunity to help improve transparency in IARC's flagship initiative.

David Collingridge

Editor, *The Lancet Oncology*, London NW1 7BY, UK  
david.collingridge@lancet.com

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- 3 Burton A. Will IARC election help to change "name security" policy? *Lancet Oncol* 2003; 4: 262.
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